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UNCLAS THE HAGUE 001705

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [NL](#) [EU](#) [SY](#) [PHJM](#)

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS: RESPECTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN SYRIA

REF: STATE 142629

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY.

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: THE DUTCH, AS CURRENT EU PRESIDENT, WILL CONTINUE TO PURSUE A POLICY OF ENGAGEMENT WITH SYRIA TO ENCOURAGE IMPROVEMENTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS. THE EU'S ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT WITH SYRIA HAS BEEN FINALIZED, BUT HAS NOT BEEN IMPLEMENTED DUE TO SYRIAN OBJECTIONS TO ITS NON-PROLIFERATION LANGUAGE. THE DUTCH SPECIAL AMBASSADOR FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IS VISITING SYRIA AS PART OF HIS CURRENT TRIP THROUGH THE REGION AND WILL SEEK A POSITIVE GESTURE ON HUMAN RIGHTS FROM DAMASCUS. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) POLCOUNS DELIVERED REFTTEL DEMARCHE POINTS ON RESPECTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN SYRIA TO MICHEL DEN HOND, DIRECTOR OF THE DUTCH MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS' OFFICE OF NORTH AFRICAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN AFFAIRS, ON JUNE 7. IN DELIVERING THE DEMARCHE, POLCOUNS STRESSED THAT THE DUTCH, AS CURRENT EU PRESIDENT, HAD A SPECIAL OBLIGATION TO ENSURE THAT THE EU TREATED RECENT SYRIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES WITH APPROPRIATE SERIOUSNESS.

2. (SBU) IN RESPONSE, DEN HOND NOTED THAT HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES WERE AND WOULD REMAIN AN ISSUE FOR DISCUSSION BETWEEN THE EU AND SYRIA. ALTHOUGH THE PROPOSED EU-SYRIAN ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT WAS CURRENTLY STALLED (PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF SYRIAN OBJECTIONS TO NON-PROLIFERATION LANGUAGE), DEN HOND ARGUED THAT IMPLEMENTING SUCH AN AGREEMENT WOULD GIVE THE EU ADDITIONAL MECHANISMS TO INFLUENCE THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT POSITIVELY. THE EU'S BASIC POSITION, DEN HOND STRESSED, IS THAT ENGAGEMENT IS GENERALLY A MORE USEFUL TOOL THAN ISOLATION IN SUCH CASES.

3. (SBU) DEN HOND SAID THAT THE EU COMMISSION WOULD SHORTLY BE SENDING A REPRESENTATIVE TO SYRIA FOR DISCUSSIONS ON MOVING THE ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT FORWARD. IN RESPONSE TO POLCOUNS' QUESTION, DEN HOND ASSERTED THAT THERE WOULD BE NO FURTHER NEGOTIATIONS ON THE TEXT OF THE AGREEMENT, NOTING THAT LANGUAGE ON HUMAN RIGHTS HAD ALREADY BEEN INCLUDED.

4. (SBU) STEPPING OUT OF HIS EU ROLE, DEN HOND REAFFIRMED THAT THE DUTCH ALSO HAVE A NATIONAL INTEREST IN PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ELSEWHERE. HE NOTED THAT PIET DE KLERK, THE DUTCH MFA'S SPECIAL AMBASSADOR FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, WAS VISITING SYRIA AS PART OF HIS CURRENT TRIP THROUGH THE REGION; HE WOULD ALSO VISIT EGYPT, ISRAEL AND THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, JORDAN, AND LEBANON. DEN HOND HOPED THAT THIS VISIT MIGHT ENCOURAGE DAMASCUS TO MAKE SOME GESTURES IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS AREA, WHICH IN TURN WOULD ALLOW THE EU TO TAKE A MORE ACTIVE APPROACH TO SYRIA.

SOBEL